

A Thriller Night by Punzie the Platypus

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Summary: Post-S1. Nancy calls Jonathan one hot summer night, needing to get out of the house—wanna go see a movie? He agrees, not sure what to think when he becomes the shoulder she needs to cry on while Ghostbusters plays on in the background. Still S/N, one-sided J/N.

A Thriller Night

Soli Deo gloria

DISCLAIMER: I do NOT own Stranger Things. Or *Ghostbusters*. Or Scooby-Doo. Or Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

(I secretly ship Jonathan/Nancy but it isn't very canonical at the moment, so I'm writing something that's kinda canon. :P)

It was a hot June night in Hawkins, Indiana. Jonathan felt jumpy and hyperactive, like he couldn't stay quietly at home. Something in the air made his skin itch; he couldn't stand to walk around their house one more time. His mom wearily watched him pace the hallway as she finished the supper dishes, letting them stack precariously in the dish drainer. "Jonathan, are you okay?" she asked, leaning over the counter. These days, she always kept an almost too wary eye on her sons' moods and behaviors.

"I'm . . . I'm fine. I just . . ." Jonathan dragged his bangs back; they fell back into his eyes in a haphazard, sticky-outty sort of way. He shrugged as he wore a hole in the hallway carpet. "I just gotta get out of the house."

Will sat on their sofa, watching a rerun of *Scooby-Doo*. He watched Jonathan's incessant pacing and met his mother's worried eyes across the rooms. Something in the boy's eyes calmed his mother: He's okay. He's just Jonathan. He's human, too. He can't always stay shut up with us.

While Joyce didn't explicitly ban going out at night, ever since Will came back, she'd set a strict curfew of home by ten o'clock. She always stayed up late waiting for her boys; she could never sleep until she tucked them into bed personally.

She *needed* to be calmed by Will. Jonathan was seventeen and old enough to care for himself, but she still didn't like the worried feeling in her chest every time her sons walked out her front door.

"Do you . . . um . . . want to go out? Do something?" Joyce offered

weakly.

"I dunno. I . . ." Jonathan shook his head. He was about to disappear into his room to listen to some old CDs when the hall phone rang.

Every Byers stared at the phone. Joyce's heartbeat still quickened every time it innocently rang.

Jonathan strode forward, eager for distraction from the incessant energy inside of him begging to do *something*. He said, "Hello?" into the receiver. It was probably just Sheriff Hopper with more theories to run by Mom, or Mike Wheeler or Lucas or Dustin for Will. Nobody . . . nobody ever called for *Jonathan*.

Which is why Jonathan almost slammed the receiver back onto the wall when he heard a girl's small voice, "Is this the Byers house?"

It was for Jonathan. It was also Nancy Wheeler. *Nancy*.

Jonathan was too quiet for too long. His mother stared at him with concerned eyes. Will rolled his hand around, meaning, 'Dude, speak.'

Jonathan gulped, snatched back his runaway courage, and said calmly, "It is."

"Okay. Is Jonathan there?"

"This is he."

"Oh. Jonathan. This is um . . . Nancy Wheeler. Um . . . I was just . . . wondering . . ." She sounded sort of stressed out and nervous, high-strung—kinda like Jonathan felt right now. "I mean, are you busy tonight?"

"Me? Now? No." Jonathan could've kicked himself. He was cursed to only be able to say monosyllabic sentences. Stupid. *Stupid*.

"Would you want to . . . um . . . go see a movie or something? It's just . . . I can't stay at my house a moment longer. I need to get out. I need to not be alone . . ."

Jonathan almost couldn't hear her 'cause of the unnatural, abnormal

thumping of his heartbeat. He said, "S-sure. There's, um," he glanced at the ground, screwed his eyes up, trying to remember, "there's this new movie playing at the drive-in. It's called *Ghostbusters*. Want to go see that?"

Nancy wryly chuckled, which was good, considering how nervous she otherwise sounded. "Sounds right up our alley."

"Okay. I'll . . . um . . . come pick you up." He glanced at his watch. "There's an eight-thirty showing. If we book it, we can make it."

"Okay. Hurry."

She didn't need to tell *him* to hurry. "Okay. Be right there. Hold tight." He put the phone back and just stood there for a moment, replaying the conversation back in his mind, asserting to himself that *yes, what just happened* did just happen, *and he needed to get his mom's car keys*.

"Well, Jonathan, who was it?" Joyce asked nervously. She was always, always, *always* paranoid nowadays. Jonathan didn't foresee a future where she wasn't. Or where he wasn't, either, for that matter.

"It was just Nancy," he said calmly, 'cause you had to speak to Mom calmly these days. "She wants to get out of the house. We're going to go see that new comedy, *Ghostbusters*, at the drive-in."

"Right now?" Joyce asked hurriedly.

"Yeah, right now. Can I have the car keys?"

"Well, if you go right now to her house, then you go see the movie, which must be like two hours, and then back to drop her back off, Jonathan, you won't be home until like, eleven. That breaks curfew." When she saw the look on his face, like he was controlling himself and trying to keep his voice calm and even, "It's an important curfew that has to be strictly observed whether you like it or not. Things happen late at night. We know that. We *all* know that."

"Mom, she's expecting me. She sounded nervous and desperate on the phone. She needs someone with her right now," Jonathan said.

"Isn't she at home? Doesn't she have her brother, or her—her father,

or *her* mother taking care of her? Jonathan, it's not worth the risk—"

"Mom, I'm seventeen. I can handle myself. I can't—I can't stay cooped up in here all night! I'll go insane! Please, Mom," Jonathan put his hands together pleadingly, "it's not even a school night. Let me go out this once. I promise I'll be home by eleven. I won't do it again. Just this once, Mom. Let me live a little."

Joyce pressed her lips into a thin white line, and was about to say "no" again when Will leaned over the side of the couch and said, "Mom." She looked quickly at him and his calm face. Will glanced at Jonathan and nodded. "Let him go, Mom. Don't keep him inside because of me. We didn't know what was out there before. Now we do. Jonathan knows what to do."

"We don't know what *else* there might be out there, though, what else could be lurking in the Upside Down and crawling through into our world. We don't know—" Joyce ran along a tangent, desperate.

Jonathan put a hand on her shoulder reassuringly. "Mom," he said, a little resigned, "we *don't* know. But we can't live our whole lives in fear of the unknown. If we do, then we don't live." The strong look in his eyes pleaded with his mom, silently. *Let me go and watch a movie with a cute girl. Let me be seventeen. Let me live.*

Joyce closed her eyes and fiercely hugged her eldest son. Jonathan held her just as close. Will smiled, knowing that she'd relented, and turned back to his *Scooby-Doo*. Somehow it did him good to see those kids beat those monsters, who were usually only human in the end.

Joyce pulled herself almost instantaneously from Jonathan's shoulder and said sternly, wagging a finger at him, "Call me the moment you get to the Wheelers' and call me the moment you take her back. No getting outside of the car except for going in and out of her house. Stay in the car at all times at the drive-in. I don't care if you hear a billion scary noises. *No investigating.* Bolt out of there if you need to. You're in a car, after all."

"Okay," Jonathan said, agreeing to her every term.

She framed his face with her two small hands and said, looking very

old and maternal, "Be safe, okay, Jonathan? You're my only Jonathan."

Jonathan put his hands on his mother's wrists and squeezed them comfortingly. "I'll be careful."

"Okay." She nodded once. Then she almost gave him a shove. "Go, go! She's waiting for you! Girls don't like to be kept waiting!"

Jonathan scrambled around the house getting his shoes on and peeking at his hair in the hall mirror. Will popped up from the couch and said encouragingly, "Go get 'em, Jonathan!"

"Oh, shut up," Jonathan said good-naturedly, giving his brother's hair a ruffle. He grabbed the car keys, kissed his mother on the cheek, and raced out the front door. Joyce watched the car start up and disappear, second-guessing herself as she wondered if she'd done the right thing. However, one reassuring nod from a smiling Will put most of those paranoid thoughts to bed.

To poor Jonathan, nothing could've been more embarrassing than pulling up to the Wheelers' house with Nancy running immediately out to him, forcing him to say, "Can I use your house phone? Mom wanted me to let her know that I got here okay."

Of course Nancy and the whole Wheeler family—especially Mike, who sat at the kitchen table and gave Jonathan a friendly wave—was more than understanding. But still. It was embarrassing to feel so babysat at age seventeen.

Jonathan was relieved when he and Nancy walked back down the pathway to his mom's sedan. He made a move to open the passenger door for her. Nancy didn't expect it, but she took it in stride. He didn't say a word until they were driving along the streets of Hawkins, making a straight beeline—as promised—to the drive-in theater. He finally said, "So, um, how are you doing?"

Nancy sat with one arm hanging out the open window. Her long brown hair was tucked into an untidy bun to keep the back of her neck cool. She wore bright orange leggings and an off-the-shoulder blouse. Jonathan didn't usually pay attention to what other people

wore, but tonight, it was like he noticed every single detail about her.

She shrugged. "I'm fine. I just needed to get out of the house, is all." She looked out the window quickly, not wanting to meet his eyes.

Jonathan didn't know how to carry the conversation after that. She'd seemed so uncharacteristically nervous and faltering on the phone. She didn't look like it now. He put his own arm on his open window and stuck in a cassette featuring his latest mixtape. It was a hot night, but it was also getting dark and woodsy and full of animal night sounds. Michael Jackson seemed the right way to go.

Nancy tore herself from her stare outside and smirked a little at Jonathan. "Seriously? *Thriller*? *Ghostbusters* isn't actually a horror film, is it?"

"No, no, it's not," Jonathan fumbled. He skipped to the next song. "We can listen to something else—"

"I didn't say it was a bad song. Just sets a mood," Nancy said, waving a hand around. "Kind of a creepy vibe, you know. Not that we're not used to it, but . . ."

Jonathan didn't know what to say to that. "Do you want to listen to it or not?" he finally said.

"Can we just . . . be quiet, for a little while? I need some time to . . . think," Nancy finally said.

Jonathan wanted to ask her a dozen questions now, but he nodded, and let the wind and the sound of his car crunching against the rocky road be their night's soundtrack.

They pulled up to the drive-in. Once waved through, Jonathan pulled into an empty space on the flattened grass. A few odd cars were already there. He killed the engine and hooked up the microphone onto his window. He settled back on his seat and breathed out deep. For all their hurrying, they were early. Movie trailers and previews still held up the big movie screen.

Jonathan leaned back in his seat. His eyes drifted over to Nancy. She didn't seem to notice him. He let himself memorize her profile—her

folded arms, her vehement stare straight ahead, the small jut of her chin, the curve of her lips, the furrowing of her eyebrows, the shining of her eyes—

Wait—she—she was *crying*. Or at least letting the tears collect in her eyes, sheer stubbornness prohibiting them from falling.

"Hey, Nancy," Jonathan asked in a quiet, tender voice, "are you okay?"

She nodded her head slowly, balancing herself, keeping the tears back. Then she shook her head violently, giving in to not lying, screwing her eyes shut so the tears flung onto her cheeks.

"Hey, hey, hey," Jonathan said, pulling himself closer to her, tentatively wrapping an arm around her shoulder. Her chest shook as she leaned her head against his shoulder; he could feel every shudder that shook through her thin frame. "What's wrong? Would it be better to talk about it?"

"It's nothing. It's stupid. Just . . . stupid," she managed to stutter out.

"No, it's not. Whatever it is, it's not. If it can make you cry like this . . . it's not stupid."

Nancy gulped and said, "It's just . . . Steve and I got into this big fight." Jonathan stiffened at the very mention of Steve's name, but he relaxed his embrace around her shoulders to not betray himself. "It wasn't about anything serious. It was just a disagreement. We were both too stubborn and loud and it grew into this big shouting match. He was angry and so was I. He went on a trip with his parents a couple of days ago and we haven't talked since and we haven't made up yet and I don't know if he's still mad even though I know I'm no longer mad, and I couldn't—I couldn't *stand* being in my house anymore, with Mom barging into my room wondering, all concerned, if he'd called yet, and Mike asking me if I was okay every time I went downstairs, like my twelve-year-old brother should be mothering me—and—and I'm sure they're all well-meaning and all, even Dad, but I couldn't stand their staring eyes and their *pity* for me. And then I felt very alone despite them, thinking that Steve was gone and—and *Barb* isn't here, and I wanted to be alone but I also didn't want to be alone

r-right now so I called *you* and—and—"

"Hey, hey, hey," Jonathan said, rubbing his hand against her arm in a soothing motion. She shook and he held her as the previews disappeared and the beginning of the movie started. He paid it no mind as he held her.

Eventually she calmed down, though periodically a random shudder would make her whole body shiver. She finally looked up and met his eyes. "Thanks for being such a good friend, Jonathan."

His heart ached at the word *friend*, but if friend is what she needed him to be for her right now, he had no arguments. "It's no problem," he said quietly. "Sometimes you just need a shoulder to cry on."

"Thanks for being that shoulder, though," she said. She dropped her eyes and snuggled her head against his shoulder. Her heartrate returned to normal and for the first time in a while, she felt *safe*. She felt calm and like her mind wasn't racing around with worried thoughts and *what ifs*. Jonathan Byers felt like *safe* and *home* to her.

Jonathan didn't know what he set out to do when Nancy Wheeler called his house asking to go see a movie with him. He'd be lying if he said he hadn't hoped that she'd broken up with Steve. Sure, it was a thought in his head and a hope in his heart, but it quickly dissipated. She wasn't brokenhearted by Steve and she didn't want *him*; she just needed to breathe with someone for the moment, someone who could understand and hold her at such a weak moment.

Steve should've been that person. But he was the one she'd argued with and hadn't reconciled with yet. So that left Jonathan, her friend, to be there.

Her friend. That hurt, but Jonathan pushed aside that hurt. She didn't need him to be her boyfriend. She needed him to be her *friend*, and he was whatever she needed him to be to her.

The movie was funny enough. Jonathan felt her smile against his shoulder more than once; some of her pretty rare laughs filled his ears a couple of times. That made him smile more than the movie

did.

They were silent on the way home. They listened to *Thriller* on repeat. She let her hand play against the strong wind blasting past the car through the open window. He walked her inside her house, greeted Mrs. Wheeler and Mike—whom she scolded for still being up and sent up to bed—, called his mom and heard her relieved voice, and then made his way to the door.

Just as he was about to step off to his car, Nancy opened the door. "Jonathan?" she said.

He quickly turned to meet her eyes.

"Thank you," she said simply.

He couldn't trust himself to speak. So he nodded.

She stepped forward and closing her eyes, gratefully kissed him on the cheek. He stood as still as a statue.

Opening her eyes, she nodded back, and went back into the house.

He pocketed his hands and slowly made his way to his mom's car. When he arrived home, Joyce lifted her head from the sofa. "Jonathan! You're home! How'd it go?"

He shrugged, hands lost in his pockets. "It went fine. It was . . . just fine."

Joyce put her hand out and squeezed his hand tightly. "Just fine?" she said, for once sounding like the mother of a teenage son with an aching heart rather than a paranoid, nervous mother.

"Yeah." He nodded. A tight smile. "Just fine."

She released his hand and watched after him sadly as he went to his room.

He played *Thriller* far into the night, unable to sleep. Maybe it was the song and the scary and surreal paranormal aspects of the movie, or maybe it was his beating, aching heart that kept him awake.

Thanks for reading! Review?